

# Other Churches and Chapels

## St. John's Church

Towards the end of the 19th century the area of Stratfield Mortimer known as The Common was rapidly expanding and by 1881 the need for another Anglican place of worship became apparent. Richard Benyon gave the money and the church was consecrated in 1882. The building was called a Chapel of Ease because it saved the mile walk to the parish church of St. Mary. At that time it consisted of what is now the Lady Chapel and vestry, with a stumpy central tower. The architect was Mr. Armstrong, son of the architect of St. Mary's; the Clerk of Works was William Rhind.



It was constructed in the contemporary fashion of polychrome brickwork with a warm-looking interior of cream plaster and brick. Fifteen years later the building was so well-used that a larger one became necessary. An extension was built in a matching style, to a design by Swinfen Harris, the most obvious addition being the present tower containing a peal of six bells. Other improvements consisted of a larger nave, sanctuary and choir. The organ was installed at this time.

Over the years more additions have been made, including a memorial screen at the west end to Canon Lovett Cameron, who was vicar at the time the church was built, and in 1989 an upper storey was added to the vestry as a parish office, with kitchen and cloakroom on the ground floor.

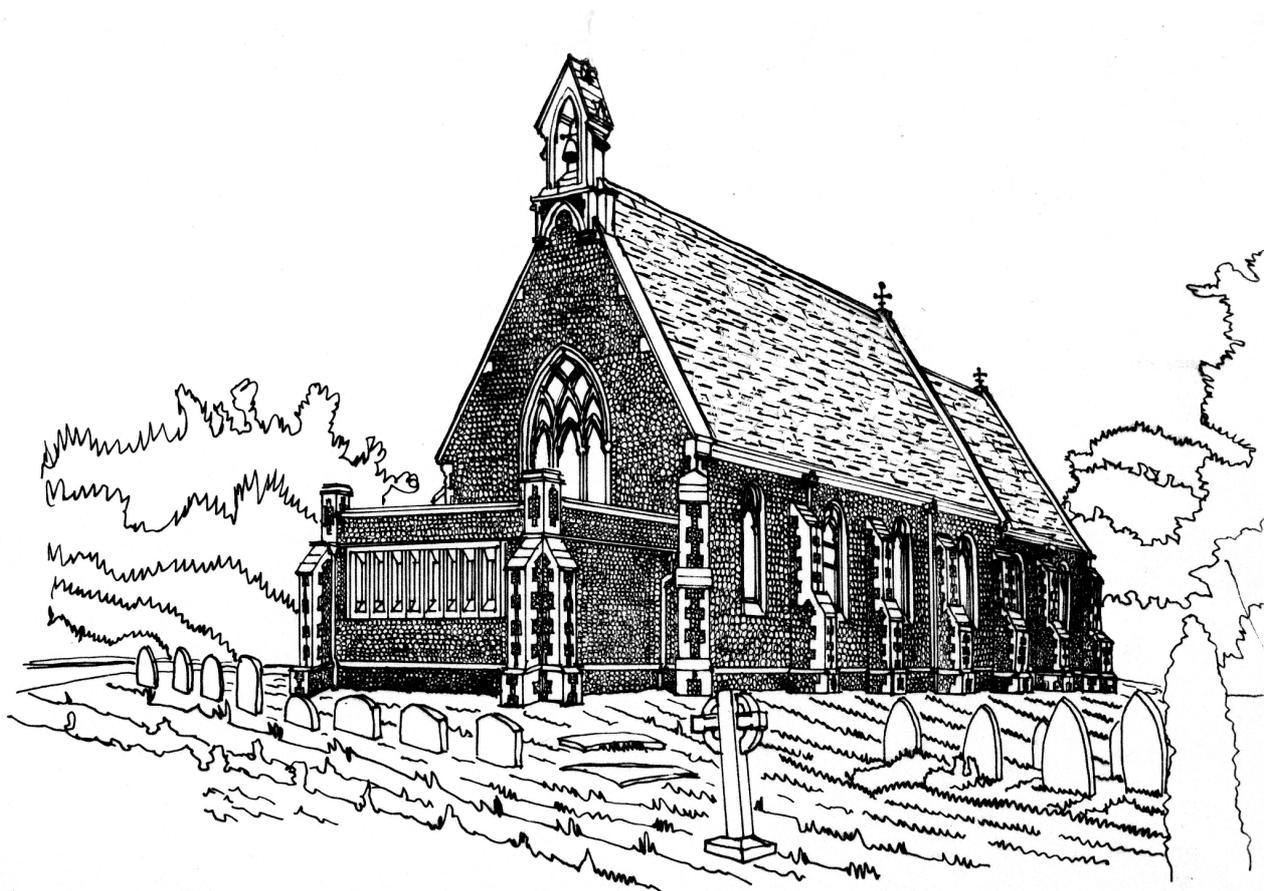
The church possesses some pleasant reminders of earlier days, including a portrait in oils of a seventeenth century Mortimer vicar, the Reverend Heycock (1671-1736), a model of old St.

Mary's Church made by Miss Gosling, a recent watercolour by Arthur Atkinson of the exterior of St. John's Church before the extension and a pair of highly decorated candlesticks by Butterfield, the well-known Victorian architect.

### **St. Saviour's Church, Mortimer West End**

In 1870 the Hampshire part of Mortimer became a separate parish. The well-loved little church of St. Saviour was given by Richard Benyon in 1856.

The carved altar was a gift from Mrs Herbert Benyon in 1901 and two vestries were added in 1902, one for the vicar and one for the choir, which then numbered four men and eight boys. The original vestry was converted into an organ chamber. In 1903 the carved screen was erected to commemorate the coronation of King Edward VII and the pulpit added three years later. The stained glass window to the east was given by the first vicar, the Reverend A. L. White and his brother, the first of many given over the years. The lych gate, a memorial to the Reverend and Mrs. White, was erected by their three children and dedicated in 1910.



The pleasant churchyard contains the parish war memorial. William Lawes on whom W. H. Hudson based the character of Caleb Bawcombe in 'A Shepherd's Life' is buried there, but his grave is unmarked.

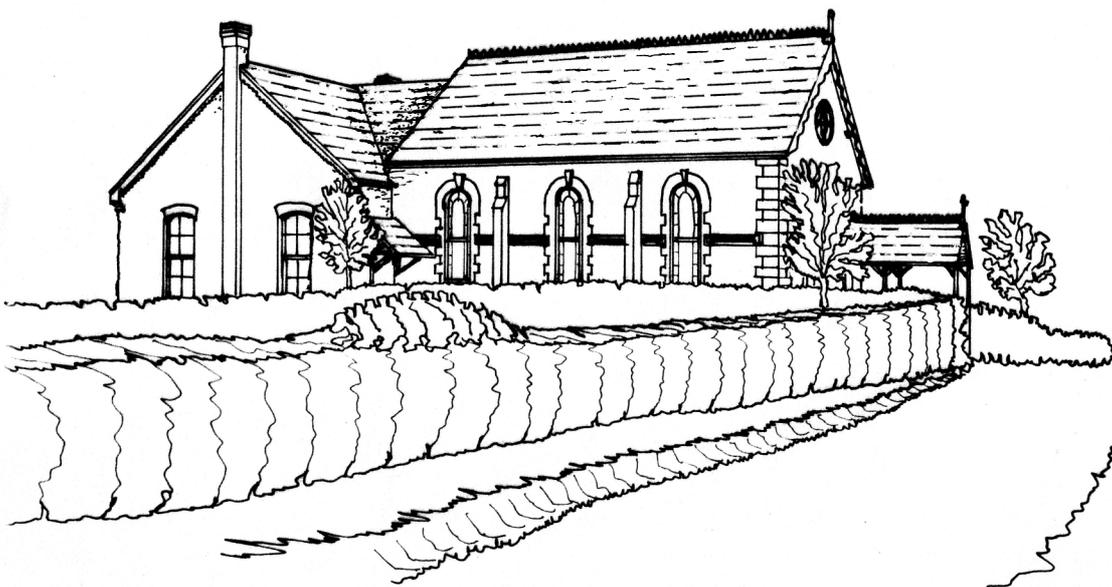
Electricity came to West End in 1938, not only lighting the church, but also adding a blower

to the organ. St. Saviour's Church suffered damage in the storm of 1989, but the roof was renewed due to the generosity of the villagers and the Englefield Trust.

## Mortimer Methodist Church

"As stupid as oxen". After his first visit to the Reading area on March 8th 1739 John Wesley so described the people who would not listen to his message of the Gospel. But after other visits he was able to say in 1771 "*Their children are a more excellent spirit*".

Methodism came to Mortimer in 1835 when the Circuit was enlarged with Reading at its centre. One of the missionaries appointed at that time was the Reverend T. Jackson and when he was informed of the appointment he was some 250 miles away. He took a fortnight but he walked all the way to Reading and became the pioneer of the work to the west of the town. It is recorded that on Sunday April 19th 1835 he preached to 1,000 people at Forbury Hill in Reading. The following Sunday he attended a 5am prayer meeting at Aldermaston Soke, then later that morning preached at Oakfield Common, and again at Silchester in the afternoon. In the evening he addressed a large congregation in Mortimer, the meeting place believed to be a barn either in Drury Lane or Simms Lane, and then finished with a Prayer Meeting at West End. In 1839 Reading became an independent Circuit and in 1857 Silchester was known as the Silchester Branch, Mortimer being just a part of it.



The Methodist Chapel in Drury Lane, Mortimer, was built in 1866 for the sum of £245 on land given by Mr Harrison and was in regular use from that date.

The Primitive Methodist Magazine of 1873 contains an appreciation of the life and work of the Reverend James Green, one of the oldest local preachers on the Silchester Circuit, who died in 1871 and was buried in the Drury Lane Burial Ground. As a boy he had been sent to the Independents' Sabbath School in Mortimer, joined the Methodists in Silchester and became a local preacher

*"Though poor in this world's goods  
He was rich in faith  
And full of the Holy Ghost".*

On Christmas Day 1945, the Drury Lane Chapel congregation invited a party of German prisoners-of-war to join in their service. They came under armed guard with their Lutheran Pastor. The Lutheran pattern of service was not unlike that of the Methodists and by arrangement a dual service was held. The hymn tunes, well known in both countries, were sung in chorus, and Bible readings, prayers and sermons by both pastors were translated so that everyone could share.

Being on the edge of Mortimer village, the Drury Lane Chapel was becoming more and more out of the way as new developments were built in other parts of the village and a site nearer the centre was sought and eventually found in West End Road.

The foundation stone-laying ceremony on Saturday September 10th 1955 for the new Methodist Hall there was conducted by the Superintendent Minister, Reverend E. S. Williamson. After tea (costing 1s 6d) in St. John's Hall opposite, there was a public celebration in the Drury Lane Chapel at 6.30pm with singing by the West Reading Youth Choir.

The Drury Lane building is now a private dwelling, although the burial ground is still in use. The latest burial there was in early March 1993.

A building site for new premises adjoining the Hall was given by Mrs E. B. Matthews of Bournemouth and Mr Eli M. Jarvis of Mortimer. The stone-laying ceremony here was conducted by the Reverend Donald R. Lee on December 4th 1971 and it was recorded that the whole building and furnishing together cost £9,600.

The opening and dedication were performed by Miss Cicely Sirman, Senior Church Trustee, on Saturday May 13th 1972. Miss Sirman herself died in February 1987 and is buried in the Drury Lane Burial Ground.

### **The Congregational Chapel, Mortimer West End**

At the far end of the parish, between Burnt Common and the Padworth Road, stands an eighteenth century building, derelict for many years but now restored.

In 1778 John Whitburn, a young turf cutter, "*Feeling deep concern for the salvation of his perishing neighbours he attempted to awaken them by argument, reading and prayer*" runs an entry in the old church book, so he held meetings in his cottage near the site of the present chapel and in the summer he preached to his friends and neighbours under the

apple trees in his orchard. When winter came the cottage was too small for them all.

John Mulford of Tadley offered assistance and the chapel was erected in 1798. John Whitburn continued to preach, assisted by others, until 1803 when Andrew Pinnell came to Mortimer. Sadly, the register records his first burial as that of John Whitburn, laid to rest beside the chapel. By 1805 the congregation had grown and John Mulford paid for the chapel to be enlarged, also a house for the minister, and contributed £20 a year to Mr Pinnell's stipend. John Mulford died in 1814 aged 93.

The Evangelical Society was dissolved in 1826 and the chapel was sold to the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion whose property it remains.